

## CGRFA 17 Highlights: Tuesday, 19 February 2019

On Tuesday, delegates completed their deliberations on nutrition and genetic resources for food and agriculture (GRFA) and discussed the following issues:

- The report on the State of the World's Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture (SOW-BFA), including needs and possible actions in response to the report;
- Aquatic GRFA, including the report on the State of the World's Aquatic GRFA (SOW-AQGR) and options for follow up to the report; and
- Plant GRFA, including review of implementation of the second Global Plan of Action on Plant GRFA (GPA-PGR).

Delegates also decided to continue deliberations on follow up to the State of the World's Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture report and access and benefit-sharing in informal groups, and to revisit a draft decision on "digital sequence information" (DSI) later in the week.

### Nutrition and GRFA

Delegates continued discussing the review of work on GRFA and Nutrition (CGRFA-17/19/6). AFRICA requested FAO to support research on using GRFA to promote nutrition.

ASIA called for multi-level promotion of underutilized crops. BRAZIL cautioned that new food-based indicators should be relevant and prevent national reporting burden. The EUROPEAN REGIONAL GROUP (EUROPE) said research should focus on promoting high quality and affordable nutrient-dense foods, and improvement of agricultural systems. EUROPE and the RUSSIAN FEDERATION supported further promotion of sustainable diets. ECUADOR requested FAO to compile and share best practices on GRFA and nutrition at CGRFA 18. The US, with CANADA, noted the need for more evidence, and opposed the inclusion of sub-species level guidance in the Voluntary Guidelines.

ARGENTINA urged allocating more resources to the Benefit-sharing Fund of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGR) to support healthy diets based on conservation and use of local varieties. GUYANA welcomed support for the genetic improvement of plant varieties and livestock breeds to enhance nutritional value. PANAMA stressed agro-ecological approaches.

The INTERNATIONAL PLANNING COMMITTEE FOR FOOD SOVEREIGNTY (IPC) called for greater recognition of the value of ancestral knowledge. CBD said the International Day for Biological Diversity 2019 theme, "our biodiversity, our food, our health," could help raise awareness. BIOVERSITY INTERNATIONAL highlighted its Biodiversity for Food and Nutrition project. OXFAM and NORWAY proposed inviting observers to share their best practices and lessons learned in mainstreaming biodiversity into nutrition policies.

### Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture

**The State of the World's Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture:** Chair Wigmore noted that the SOW-BFA report is an important contribution to the discussions on the post-2020 global biodiversity framework. The Secretariat presented the report's main conclusions (CGRFA-17/19/7.1-3), highlighting it includes information submitted in 91 country reports.

EUROPE requested integrating the findings of the SOW-BFA into FAO's biodiversity mainstreaming strategy. ARGENTINA noted multiple studies will be required to mainstream biodiversity into production sectors.

EUROPE, ECUADOR, JAMAICA and IPC said countries should respond to the findings of their country reports, including through adequate policies and programmes. Noting challenges in biodiversity mainstreaming, BRAZIL and ARGENTINA requested stating that countries adopt policies "as appropriate," and "according to their capacities." The NEAR EAST, ASIA and CAMEROON, opposed by the US, requested a follow-up mechanism for implementation for countries that submitted reports.

ASIA, the US and CANADA lamented the lack of time to review the SOW-BFA. AFRICA, supported by BRAZIL urged FAO to support countries facing challenges in reporting and suggested countries could use the SOW-BFA to guide policies, programmes and projects. MOROCCO called on FAO to speed up regional efforts to identify how the report can be implemented.

The CBD noted the report provides an evidence base to inform work and welcomed the identified needs and possible actions. ITPGR confirmed it will disseminate the report, including at the eighth session of its Governing Body. BIOVERSITY INTERNATIONAL noted the contribution of its Platform for Agrobiodiversity and Research to the thematic study on the resilience of production systems.

### Needs and possible actions in response to the SOW-BFA:

Axel Diederichsen (Canada), Co-Chair of the Group of National Focal Points for Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture, presented the group's report on follow-up actions (CGRFA-17/19/7.2). The Secretariat introduced a document containing revised draft needs and possible actions for follow-up (CGRFA-17/19/7.3), including a proposal for the Commission to invite FAO to adopt this document as a Global Plan of Action on Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture (GPA-BFA).

Canada, for NORTH AMERICA, JAPAN and BRAZIL said it was "premature" to suggest a GPA-BFA, with NORTH AMERICA noting that countries need time to reflect on the SOW-BFA report. The US questioned whether a GPA-BFA is needed. JAPAN and BRAZIL recalled that country action is voluntary, and implementation should be in accordance with national priorities and relevant international frameworks. BRAZIL stressed the need to build capacities and avoid additional reporting burdens.

EUROPE proposed an intersessional review process with a view to adopting a GPA-BFA along with the consideration of monitoring and reporting at CGRFA 18. ECUADOR suggested focusing on avoiding overlaps and, with ARGENTINA, on integrated teaching systems.

INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF ORGANIC AGRICULTURE MOVEMENTS (IFOAM) highlighted organic farms' greater levels of biodiversity. OXFAM called for participatory approaches and proactive engagement of indigenous peoples, smallholders, women, and youth. BIOVERSITY INTERNATIONAL drew attention to their Agrobiodiversity Index, assessing linkages between agricultural biodiversity and sustainable food systems. IPC expressed concern at some members' resistance to adopting a GPA.

Chair Wigmore established an open-ended contact group, co-chaired by Brazil and France, to agree on guidance on the SOW-BFA report and needs and possible actions.

The contact group met in the evening.

### **Access and Benefit-Sharing for GRFA**

Chair Wigmore established a Friends of the Chair group to discuss whether the Team of Technical and Legal Experts on ABS should continue and, if so, provide terms of reference for its future work. The group met in the evening

### **“Digital Sequence Information” on GRFA**

Chair Wigmore presented draft decision text, noting agreement to address opportunities, challenges, and capacity to make use of DSI, and to coordinate work with ongoing processes including the CBD and ITPGR. After short discussion, delegates agreed to suspend discussions until Members had a chance to consider the proposal.

### **Aquatic Genetic Resources**

**Report of the ITWG on Aquatic GRFA:** Intergovernmental Technical Working Group (ITWG) Vice-Chair Belemane Semoli (South Africa) summarized the ITWG's report (CGRFA-17/10/8.1) highlighting: the revised draft report on the State of the World's Aquatic GRFA (SOW-AQGR); options for follow up to the report; and the report of the second session of the Advisory Working Group on Aquatic Genetic Resources and Technologies.

**Report on the State of the World's Aquatic Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture:** Summarizing the report (CGRFA-17/19/8.2/Inf.1), the Secretariat highlighted: the process of the report's preparation; new findings, including a snapshot of current status; future trends; needs and challenges; and how the report can catalyze further action. He invited delegates to take note of the report's final proof version and requested FAO to launch the report and the “report in brief” summary in 2019.

EUROPE welcomed the SOW-AQGR and agreed with the request to finalize the report and its launch. ASIA, with BRAZIL, noted the need to strengthen capacity building with a high-level education system for aquaculture management. SOUTH AFRICA supported developing voluntary guidelines.

**Options for follow up to the SOW-AQGR:** The Secretariat introduced the options for follow up (CGRFA-17/19/8.3), including objectives, priority areas for action, an intersessional process, and a request to the Secretariat to prepare a draft GPA-AQGR for CGRFA 18.

AFRICA and ASIA supported drafting a GPA-AQGR. The US and JAPAN underscored the need for close collaboration with the FAO Committee on Fisheries. EUROPE highlighted the need for capacity building and active promotion of successful genetic improvement technologies. BRAZIL recalled that follow-up actions are voluntary, collaborative, and based on national needs and priorities.

EUROPE and SOUTH AFRICA requested considering establishing a permanent ITWG. IPC underlined the need to protect the livelihoods, culture and indigenous knowledge of small-scale fisheries communities.

### **Plant Genetic Resources**

Members of the CGRFA Secretariat and the Intergovernmental Technical Working Group on plant GRFA (ITWG-PGR) introduced the following documents:

- the report of the ninth meeting of the ITWG-PGR (CGRFA-17/19/9.1);
- FAO's activities in support of implementation of the GPA-PGR (CGRFA-17/19/9.2), including proposed activities on *in situ* conservation and on-farm management of plant GRFA, *ex situ* conservation, sustainable use, and building sustainable institutions and human capacities;
- the draft voluntary guidelines for the conservation and sustainable use of farmers' varieties/landraces (CGRFA-17/19/9.2/Inf.1.);
- a proposal for an international symposium on on-farm management of farmers' varieties/landraces (CGRFA-17/19/9.2/Inf.3.);
- a proposal for an international symposium on *in situ* conservation of crop wild relatives and wild food plants (CGRFA-17/19/9.2/Inf.4.);
- facilitating the implementation and monitoring of the Genebank Standards (CGRFA-17/19/9.2/Inf.5)
- a draft revised reporting format for the second GPA-PGR (CGRFA-17/19/9.2/Inf.6); and
- a report on the restructuring of World Information and Early Warning System on plant GRFA (WIEWS) including a revised reporting format for WIEWS (CGRFA-17/19/9.2/Inf.2)

Many supported the draft voluntary guidelines on farmers' varieties and welcomed the proposed international symposia.

EUROPE urged making funds available for regeneration of genebank accessions and suggested addressing rehabilitation of seed systems. AFRICA highlighted measures to ensure the sustainability of community seed banks. ASIA urged FAO support for countries to revise national plans on crop wild relatives, taking into account the voluntary guidelines. NEAR EAST highlighted the need for capacity building.

The US suggested the symposium on farmers' varieties address the interface between *ex situ* conservation and on-farm management, as well as the contribution of participatory plant breeding. BRAZIL opposed preparation of practical guides on the use of Genebank Standards and of a proposal to monitor their implementation.

The discussion will continue on Wednesday.

### **In the Corridors**

On Tuesday, CGRFA 17 delegates faced a dilemma. After celebrating the report on the State of the World's Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture (SOW-BFA) as a milestone publication, they found themselves debating the next steps: should they adopt a set of “revised draft needs and actions” as a Global Plan of Action (GPA) or use the report to work towards a negotiated version at CGRFA 18? One delegate argued that adopting the draft document as GPA now would “violate the Commission's standard of careful deliberation.” Others countered that “if we wait another two years, there may not be much biodiversity for food and agriculture left to protect.” Would the wait be worth it? A seasoned observer noted that recommended actions are already included in sectoral GPAs on plant, animal and forest genetic resources. However, one delegate disagreed: “The BPA report can steer us towards integrated action. We can't achieve our goals if we remain boxed in these sectoral silos.”